

Minutes
Agricultural & Natural Resources Advisory Committee
Thursday, March 12, 2020, at 9:00 am
E. Jay Carlson Building
BCS Large Conference Room
18400 Murdock Circle
Port Charlotte, FL 33948-1094

MEMBERS PRESENT

Andy Dodd, Chairman
Nigel Morris, Vice-Chairman
Lindsay Harrington
Dan Ryals
David Kemeny
David Nielsen

MEMBERS EXCUSED

MEMBERS ABSENT

Joel Beverly
Jay Chastain

GUEST SPEAKERS

Alan Brock – SW Regional Director, FL Dept. of Agriculture

STAFF

Commissioner Tiseo – Commission Liaison
Matt Trepal, Principal Planner – Staff Liaison
Shaun Cullinan, Planning & Zoning Official
Ben Bailey, Interim Community Development Director
Diane Clim, Sr. Administrative Assistant

GUESTS

Paul Polk, Charlotte Co. Property Appraiser
Amanda Lafond, Charlotte Co. Appraiser III
B. Calvert – Sun newspaper

CALL TO ORDER/ROLL CALL/DETERMINATION OF QUORUM

The **March 12, 2020** the meeting of the ***Agricultural and Natural Resources Advisory Committee*** was called to order at 9:01 a.m. by ***Chairman Dodd.***

ADDITIONS/DELETIONS TO AGENDA

None

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Chairman Dodd called for action on the minutes of the November 14, 2019 ANRAC Meeting, *there was a motion to approve by Nigel Morris, seconded by Lindsay Harrington; the motion passed unanimously.*

NEW BUSINESS

- **Alan Brock, Southwest Regional Director, Florida Department of Agriculture**

Chairman Dodd introduced Alan Brock, SW Regional Director with Florida Dept. of Agriculture.

Mr. Brock said introduced himself. He is the Regional Director for the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (FDACS). He has been with the department 6 months and he is learning a lot. He grew up on a farm in North Florida. He was a County Commissioners for one term and then went to law school. Worked as a public defender for a while, then came to this position. My job is to be the liaison between what is happening here in Southwest Florida and what is going on in Tallahassee. If you have any concerns or questions, feel free to reach out to me. (He handed out his business cards to each member) They do everything from licensing, to concealed weapons permits, to overseeing all the weights and measures of the State, also if there are any differences between consumers and businesses.

Mr. Brock said as you are all aware, agriculture is the second largest driver in Florida. We have a \$137 billion dollar impact. 2 million jobs, 4 million dollars in export to 161 nations. Here in Charlotte County, it is one of the best producers in the nation. Over 18 percent of the County work in agriculture related employment. This helps maintain Charlotte County's 306 farms. We are facing new challenges every day. We are continually fighting for dollars so growers and ranchers can access latest water and energy efficient equipment. We requested 6 million dollars to update our BMP manuals that reflect the latest sciences and technology, and additional staff to increase enrollment verification. We want to update the guidelines and manuals. Try to make them more for each farm and ranch. If a ranch or farm can prove with their science and technology that what they are doing is meeting the goals, and are trying to get them implemented, they can implement their own plan. That is an expensive process. This can usually only be done by very large farms. There are manuals from Monroe County up to Escambia County where I'm from and the soils down here are very different. He spoke with ranchers and farmers from southwest Florida and trying to figure out how they measure phosphates, things in soil, and make sure you have the right fertilizers and production for all your plants, it's complicated. They are trying to update the manuals so everyone doesn't have to spend a lot of money for special scientist to work on that. We have to first have test done, which are being done with science and research, then they are reviewed. It is a lengthy process and we are trying to get that done, to help make it easier for the

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farmers and ranchers. We also asked for another 32.6 million dollars to support rural family lands programs. It is a very important conservation initiative that helps protect lands and waters. This is helping to do everything from buying the development rights on farms so they can continue to do farming and they don't have to yield to pressure from developers. We continue to fight the development pressure and support the citrus industry. We are asking law makers to invest in greening research and the citrus inspection trust fund. We are working on tackling food security, feeding over 3 million Floridians including children. We are working to protect our Fresh from Florida program, which brings in 125 million dollars in annual sales to Florida's producers. We have seen a 22 to 1 return on our investment. I encourage you when you are at the grocery store to look when you go into the produce area, which can be tricky because I tried doing this last week when buying oranges, and to find the Fresh from Florida, which was tricky, but I found them.

I will try to answer your questions the best I can.

Lindsay Harrington said you say there are 306 farms in Charlotte County. He asked the other members if they think there are 306 farms in Charlotte County? He said Dan Ryal's has a big operation but I look at him as a ranch and a farm. Anybody who is trying to do something 10 acres or greater, I mean, you can probably do a nursery with 2.5 acres, depends on what you are producing, but I just see 306 as a vast number for our County. Maybe Polk or Highlands County.

Mr. Brock thought 306 was on the small side after traveling around. They may be talking smaller farms or hobby farms or who keep bees.

Mr. Harrington said he would love to know the breakdown. He feels the BMP's are in good shape. I would like to see more ag people involved in what is going on day to day because the next thing you know there will be another sheet of paper, another rule and another hoop to jump through.

Andy Dodd said I don't put stock into it. In 2012, we had 284 farms (allegedly) with 217,000 acres. By 2017 we dropped by over 100,000 acres and had more farms. Goes from 217,000 down to 112,000 acres. It goes from 284 farms to up to 306. He's looked at this for years and it's all over the place. Is our farmland shrinking, is it increasing?

Dave Kemeny said maybe Babcock leases out. I know in Bermont they have several different landowners. There is a lot of citrus down there, so it could be possible.

Mr. Harrington said in the Bermont block of American Agronomics in Orange County, they each could be considered a farm. They are 2.5 acre blocks, so it could be each 2.5 acres is considered a farm.

Nigel Morris said I understand what you are saying, needless regulations, that's on one hand. On the other hand, we have a harbor here that is full of algae and things like that.

At the One Charlotte One Water assembly, in my breakout group, it included Dave Tamasto. Dave Tamasto has been a water quality guy all his life, he used to work for SWFMD now he's with Environmental Science Associates, a huge company that started back in 1969. Dave really knows his stuff and he said that the harbor is in good shape, but there are just a few hot spots, namely, SPJC (Shell, Prairie and Joshua Creeks), and Charlie creek. He said if we just concentrate on those, and clean them up, the harbor can be great. We have to keep ag on the land, so I love the whole concept of signing up for BMP's and benefiting from the assumption that by doing so you meet EPA standards, but we have got to have verifications. I think it's real important that DACS spearheads plenty of research to actually demonstrate that these BMP's are working the way we want them to.

Mr. Brock said all I can say is two things. One, it's not going to move very fast. We are trying to make it move faster by additional funding. Two, we are trying to get the research done to help these people and make it profitable.

Mr. Harrington asked, you said that agriculture was number 2. Was that including silviculture?

Mr. Brock said yes.

Mr. Harrington said so we are behind tourism. Did it include forestry?

Mr. Brock said he didn't know.

Commissioner Tiseo asked, Alan you mentioned a statistic about how many people in Charlotte County were involved with ag, can you define that?

Mr. Brock said it's coming from the same status he has in front of him. 18% of the county is involved in agriculture, which is 72,000 of your family and neighbors.

Commissioner Tiseo said, 72,000 people. We have a population of 180,000, so that is a very large number.

Someone said it's about 1/3 of the population.

Commissioner Tiseo said on the BMP's, and concerning the water quality, I have discussion from constituencies who talk about ag and their contribution to the impairment of Charlotte Harbor, and at this meeting about a year ago, we talked about it and I guess there is water quality initiatives at the agricultural level where they irrigate and retain water on site, there are rules in place for that before it's discharged. Are any of those type of BMP's included in what you are talking about in terms of monitoring that discharge or to the extent that it is discharged, because I know you can use stormwater management and retain a certain amount based on rainfall. Is there any testing required

so I can tell somebody no, that water is not only maintained on site, but if it is discharged, it is monitored somehow?

Mr. Brock said it is monitored, for the BMP process? Yes, it's regulated and monitored to make sure, because the goals approved that it's working.

Commissioner Tiseo asked if all that data is posted on their website somewhere?

Mr. Brock said he would have to check and get back to you.

Commissioner Tiseo asked, Governor DeSantis is pretty big on water quality, how is that funding going to impact agriculture (I know we talk about Lake O and reservoirs and other things). Is any of that funding that is earmarked for those water quality initiatives flow to ag to improvements or anything like that?

Mr. Brock said we did make a request for some of those funds to come our way, but we have to wait and see how the session goes. The session has been a difficult one. There's been some politics, so we are waiting to see what it all looks like. Hopefully we will know more next week. There are different programs out there, they are looking to use different farms when they are in between seasons and growing, to hold water on them.

Commissioner Tiseo said water harvesting (water farming).

Mr. Brock said we have a lot of low farms that are wet, they can store stormwater for part of the year and then when they go dry again, then you are harvesting.

Andy Dodd asked for BMP's for cattle ranchers, basically follow up with the verification stage, just tell them what type of fertilizer you use, there's no requirements for water quality testing.

Mr. Kemeny asked what BMP's are they looking at to adjust?

Mr. Brock said they are trying to figure out the appropriate levels to make sure that they are getting the nutrients needed to the plants. The easy example to use is that there is solid phosphate the plants can access, so what is happening is they don't know how much phosphate to add that is appropriate. We also have a lot of matching funds programs. These help implement water quality, like water reduction and spot treatments for fertilizers. We have cost sharing programs we can offer up to who receives BMP's.

Mr. Kemeny said he was on the original BMP's for citrus 20 years ago, then the State changed it a little, but the BMP's are not outrageous at all.

Commissioner Tiseo said all indications are they are doing what they are supposed to be doing. Others say they are contributing to water quality in the harbor, because they

use fertilizer. I can't tell them I have data that shows discharges from rain events in ag land is not contributing to the harbor. I'm looking for data.

Mr. Harrington said basically you can get the information you want to get off of shell creek and prairie creek, and maybe alligator creek too because of the ranchettes. Charlotte County basically is primarily pastureland. Farms are monitored by law and others are just told not to use fertilizer in the rainy season.

Mr. Brock said it is required in some areas, in different water sheds it is required to use BMP.

Mr. Morris said years ago we permitted a citrus grove in Hendry County and we partnered with SWFWMD to do a study on the effectiveness of a stormwater detention area. We collected the data and they analyzed it all. Detention areas do work. They retain the excess nutrients and a lot of the pesticides and pollutants; they were fully retained.

Commissioner Tiseo said SWFWMD issues permits for commercial businesses that have stormwater management areas, it is required since the 1980's, to retain so much on site for normal rain event and they have an outflow structure should it exceed that. Do the farms/farmers/ag community, are they required to operate under the same type of requirement for their water retention areas?

Mr. Morris said when Florida adopted water regulations in the mid-70's, in the case of South Florida, they adopted their rules in 1976 (stormwater management rules). Ag just kind of carried on. When Chapter 373 was adopted, there was an ag exemption. SWFWMD came in and said for big developers (citrus) then they had to have drainage systems. They all had to have stormwater treatment. When SWFWMD came along, they adopted their surface water rules the way South Florida had, but later than SWFWMD, in 1984. Because of the ag exemption I Chapter 373, they had a lot of push back. Some groves were initially designed and permitted with detention areas but latterly with ag exemption BMP's. Now a lot that goes on I the State, they are using BMP's in lieu of those other systems.

Commissioner Tiseo said you are saying the BMP's can supersede?

Mr. Morris said because SWFWMD was checked and SWFWMD still kind of makes people do certain things, but they are more stringent in regulating ag. SWFWMD has backed off completely and they do ag exemptions.

Commissioner Tiseo said to be clear, is our ag community in Charlotte County exempt from SWFWMD rules? So, they are not inspected by SWFWMD?

Mr. Morris said that's right.

Mr. Brock said he would have Patricia Hobson who is our staff in this area and works with the BMP's, I'll have her contact you.

Ben Bailey, Interim Community Development Director, introduced himself. **Mr. Bailey** said Claire Jubb who was the Community Development Director, has taken a position upstairs in Administration and he has been appointed the Interim Community Development Director. He has another meeting to attend but wanted to sit in on this meeting a little and introduce himself.

Paul Polk, Charlotte County Property Appraiser, introduced himself. **Mr. Polk** said Diane Simpson retired, she was with us over 30 years. Now we have Amanda Lafond. She is from this area, been here a long time. She has been in citrus for many years.

Amanda Lafond said she joined the Property Appraisers Office in 2012. She is excited for this new change. Her dad is Steve Varner, he does cattle and citrus. He works here and in Texas. She has been doing ag inspections for new ag applications.

Mr. Polk said she has been doing a lot of research and working together on the agriculture lands.

OLD BUSINESS

- **FGCU Agriculture Forum, Lindsay Harrington**

Mr. Harrington said he sent out a flyer he put together of what happened at the 1st Annual Ag Forum which conducted Farm City week, November 20 through 27, 2019 down at FGCU. FGCU is stepping forward with this center for agriculture business, training youths/college students to get into the business side of agriculture. They are just beginning. This is their second year. President Harten who used to work at the University of Florida is a very strong proponent of this and has been working hard to see the facility at the University is in tune with agriculture because of its significant economic impact that it has on SW Florida and Charlotte County. He has brought in some excellent people. Dr. Fritz Roker from Immokalee is Director of that department. He also has Ron Hamel who is involved with the citrus industry for years. Ron is doing a lot of public relations for them. They put this together in conjunction with the farm bureau, one of two Charlotte Directors with the Charlotte DeSoto farm bureau. It is a big thing them getting together. Recently they met in Gainesville regarding the 2020 program. They had the first meeting with great attendance with Bernie Lester, Ben Hill Griffin were there, department heads from the University attended. He was impressed with what he saw. The program was a couple of hours. They discussed economic impact upon agriculture in SW Florida and it is tremendous. They talked about conservation of order, mitigating nutrient loss and David Roll is now working for the nature conservancy and he spoke about the BMP's on farms and in the groves and the use of new modern technology and showed some videos about it. They talked about the water school at FGCU, which is working close with ag business. Barron Collier followed up with a long discussion on land use planning and how they work with Collier County. They went through some crazy gyrations with tech agriculture but also take the marginal parts of their land and be able to use them in some way to get

credit back to the farm and ranch. The next farm City Week will be the 18th of November 2020.

They will continue their tours for students and facility. They get a first-hand overview of how crops are produced in SW Florida and how industry competes on the global economy. They are also addressing college enrollment issues within the school of business for the ag degrees. They've had some hick-ups they didn't see in the first class, so they are straightening that out so the kids can get their degrees in agriculture. There will be a new look at branding the programs in order to attract more students. They are trying to break the stereotype that when you talk about agriculture, you are not just talking about farming and ranching and groves, you are talking food, fiber, medicine, there is a whole broad spectrum that you can get into this business. Also, on the business end of this not just being in the field. Their goals are trying to get 15 students into each class.

- **Water Quality Summit, Nigel Morris**

Mr. Morris said this was called the One Charlotte One Water assembly. There were many different departments collecting data and none of them knew what all the others were doing. Scott Berry, who is with the US Water Alliance, pointed out we take water for granted. We turn on the spigot and there is water there. It is the basis of all life and without it, we have nothing. We need reliable and resilient water utilities. We need sustainable agriculture. We need thriving cities, competitive industries and partnerships. Everything has to coordinate. Social and economic inclusion is really important because there are a lot of water development projects. Most important is healthy waterways. He said we have to change our whole approach to this. Embrace complexity and diversity, think differently about the whole not just part. Make water relevant to people's lived experience. Put equity at the center. Low income communities are more susceptible to sea level rises. Everybody needs to be encouraged to tell their own water stories to find the human connection. That was the introduction then we broke out into groups. My group was facilitated by Shaun, who did a fantastic job. Our first objective was what we need to be doing for the harbor. We got a lot of input from everywhere. The County will set up future assemblies.

Shaun Cullinan said Claire will be giving an update to the County Commissioners next week Tuesday (March 17th). We took all the information from the breakout groups and other things we heard and distilled it down and there were very common themes amongst all the groups. We invited about 60 people and roughly about 40 people came. I had Nigel in my group, Dave Tamasko, Dr. Mike Severse, and others. We did that by design so there would be various folks in the groups. Not just all environmental in one group. We received a lot of information we did not know other entities were doing. Claire's group had Amy Wicks, who is the district engineer for Babcock Ranch who is an expert in water quality and stormwater. We had no idea about that. We received a lot of very good information and the next step is to the Board next week, then get direction and guidance from them to do something similar. We might look at some smaller group exercises.

Commissioner Tiseo said people were asking us questions about water quality monitoring and there are so many different agencies that do their own monitoring, after pulling all that data together in one place, that is how the One Water policy came about.

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CORRESPONDENCE AND COMMUNICATIONS

None provided

PUBLIC COMMENTS

None provided

STAFF COMMENTS

None provided

MEMBER COMMENTS

Nigel Morris asked Evaluation and Appraisal, how's that coming?

Shaun Cullinan said we were able to create, and the County adopted, a formal vision statement based on the good things we were doing and the feedback we were getting. We are starting to prep for more outreach, for instance, Public Works is doing their Touch a Truck event in early May. We are getting resources together sending out survey cards, survey monkey online. What we did initially was the multi-hour-long dot exercise and that doesn't work for most people, so now we are implementing phase two of the survey cards to get their information. They can drop it off here, this will be based on the initial visioning we got, and that created the vision statement.

Matt Trepel said our Evaluation and Appraisal report is due in 2021. We started this well in advance, to make sure we are not trying to cram it all in 6 weeks. We've given ourselves a big buffer. We started to get into the reviews of the individual elements. Background and data have not been updated since the plan was first adopted in 2010.

FUTURE MEETING TOPICS


- Let Andy know

NEXT MEETING

- ❖ May 14, 2020 at 9:00 a.m. in the E. Jay Carlson Building large conference room.

ADJOURNMENT

Chair Dodd asked for a motion to adjourn. Nigel Morris motioned to adjourn; seconded by Lindsay Harrington; the Motion passed unanimously. The meeting was adjourned at 10:07 a.m.



Andy Dodd,
Chairman

Minutes of the Agricultural & Natural Resources Advisory Committee
Approved this 12 day of Nov 2020.